

SPECIAL REPORT ON THE SITUATION IN THE JAFFNA DISTRICT

1.0 Population

The population of this district as per last Census in 1981 is 738,788. The present population living in the district is around 750,000 spread out in the 14 A.G.A. divisions. It is estimated that around 150,000 persons have left the district since the eruption of the disturbances and taken refuge in areas outside North and East of the country and abroad.

1.1 Displacement

When the Government security forces started their operations again in June, 1990 there was mass displacement of residents. The security operations started suddenly and the people were taken unawares and had to leave their residences leaving behind their entire belongings and had to take refuge in schools, temples and other public places. The security operations continued and considerable areas of this district came under the control of the security forces and the residents except for a negligible few had evacuated from this area.

At present there are 79,834 families comprising 264,335 persons displaced from their permanent residences. Out of these 8968 families comprising 37,767 persons are being accommodated in welfare centres at present and the rest have found accommodation with well-wishers, relatives and friends.

Maintaining welfare centres has become a difficult task as the tiny cadjan huts of 12' x 10' constructed one for each family, two to three years ago have all decayed and are collapsing. Reconstructing all these huts has become necessary and the cost is estimated at Rs.10.25. million.

1.2 Death of Civilians and Destruction of Property

7,542 civilians had been killed and properties worth billions have been destroyed by the ongoing war in the district. Another 2590 have been maimed for life. Intensive security operations in the district by land, air and sea have resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians and colossal destruction to properties. Very often security operations are carried out without definite targets. Air strikes, shelling from security forces camps and cannon fire from naval boats are carried out at random causing heavy civilian casualties. 90 persons have died and 233 seriously injured during the eight months of the current year due to security operations in the district. These random attacks are very heavy whenever security forces suffer casualties or setbacks within the district or elsewhere. Continuous heavy serial bombings have caused heavy destruction of factories, commercial establishments, temples, churches, schools and thousands of houses.

1.3 Loss of Income

Majority of residents have lost their earning capacity owing to the various factors brought about in this district. Except for the public servants and the few traders who managed to continue their commercial activities adjusting to the prevailing situation, the rest of the people in the district had been deprived of their livelihood.

1.3.1. Cultivators

Around 65,000 cultivators of the district who are actively engaged in the production of subsidiary food crops, grapes and tobacco had to abandon cultivation as there was no electricity to work their water pumps. Agro-chemicals and fertilizers were not available. A few who changed to manually irrigating methods have to drastically reduce the extents of cultivation. Engine operated water pumps were found to be uneconomical as the fuel costs were prohibitive. Vast extents of land that were under cultivation came under army occupation. These include the entire areas of the Islands and considerable extents in the A.G.A. divisions of Sandilipay, Chankanai, Tellippalai, Kopay and Maruthankerny. These areas constitute the bulk of the fertile red soil which was under cultivation round the year.

The few families who continue cultivating small extents amidst difficulties are unable to earn anything substantial to meet their living costs. The rest of the families, most of whom are displaced, are undergoing untold hardship and faced with starvation.

1.3.2. Fishermen

Around 24,000 families who were solely dependent on fishing in the district had been badly affected by the total ban on fishing imposed by the Government. During normal times Jaffna district produced 30% of the whole Island's requirement in fish. Major portion of the catch was sent to Colombo and also for exports. The ban on fishing has deprived the entire lot of the fishing community of their livelihood. Most of them from the main Island of Kayts and coastal areas of the peninsula Karainagar, Ponnalai, Mathagal, keerimalai, Kankesanthurai, Myliddy, Palaly, Thondamannaru, Vettilaikerny and Kaddaikardu have all been displaced and are languishing as refugees in welfare centres and other places. Fishermen, who were affected by the ban on fishing were issued free dry rations under the relief scheme for a short period, were later disallowed to draw this relief. In desperation a few of them venture out to the sea defying the ban and very often lose their lives and fishing gear at the hands of the security forces. Their plight is very pathetic as they had been denied their livelihood and have also been refused any relief.

1.3.3. Skilled Workers

These include masons, carpenters, mechanics, technicians, welders and such others. The bulk of the workmen in these categories lost their livelihood as building works of all forms came to a standstill with the ban on building materials to the district. Vehicles, machinery and other heavy and small equipments ceased to function with the termination of the electricity supply and the ban on fuel. Large and small factories both State and private, workshops and all other economic activities in the district came to a standstill rendering thousands of wage earners and self-employed persons without employment. Except for the displaced persons in these categories the others do not get even the limited dry rations relief. The approximate number affected in these categories are as follows:

Masons	2,277
Carpenters	1,725
Mechanics	1,050

Technicians	1,500
Welders	350
Others	3,900
TOTAL	10,802

1.3.4. Poultry and Dairy Farms

There were considerably large poultry and dairy farms in addition to large number of small units of this industry by self-employed persons in the district. All these were abandoned as poultry and cattle food became unavailable due to the establishments that were producing these food being forced to stop production. These items which were supplemented by supplies from Colombo were also stopped as the transport routes were closed. This affected a large number of families who were dependent on this industry. As per livestock and poultry statistics of 1989 the position in the district was as follows:

Livestock and Poultry	Numbers	Average Monthly Production
Milk cows	41,425	1,318,875 litres milk
Other cows	32,990	
Bulls	20,671	
Calves	34,380	
Goats	83,352	
Sheep	14,856	
Laying hens	189,160	2,478,500 eggs
Other birds	289,588	

1.4 Food Supply to the District

Under normal times the bulk of the essential food supplies to the district came from Colombo. 10% of the rice requirement is produced in the district. A fair percentage of rice is also brought to the district by private traders from adjoining rice producing districts Kilinochchi, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu and Mannar.

Supply of food to the district was totally disrupted after June, 1990 as the road and rail routes were closed. A crisis situation developed with acute shortages for essential and other food items. The price of rice shot up to Rs.60/- a kilo, flour went up to Rs.30/- a kilo and sugar was over Rs.75/- a kilo. Even at these prices it was difficult to procure them. Subsidiary food items too went up by many folds.

It was at this time the Commissioner General of Essential Services came to the rescue, sending essential food items by ships commencing in August, 1990. Although the supply of essential food items by ships were a great relief it was far short of the normal requirement. Food stocks received by ships are primarily used for the issue of free dry rations as relief to the displaced families. Whenever possible, balance stocks are issued for cash sale through the M.P.C.S. outlets. The average number of relief recipients during 1994 is 56,470 families.

Advance payments have to be made for food stocks brought by ships for cash sale. M.P.C.S.s which have to undertake these sales are unable to make advance payments due to financial constraints. Freight and handling charges are around Rs.4/- a kilo

and all essential and other food items have to be priced Rs.4/- above the Colombo price per kilo. The irony is that even flour shipped from Trincomalee to Jaffna has to be charged this additional freight and handling cost, whereas flour taken to Colombo from Trincomalee is being sold at the fixed price. There appears to be some discrepancy on the method of pricing and freight charged for the food items shipped to Jaffna. This has to be investigated and rectified to enable the pricing of essential food items at Colombo prices in this district too, as in the case of other districts outside Colombo

Given below is a schedule showing the District's requirement and shipment of food cargo to Jaffna by the Commissioner General of Essential Services:

Item	Monthly Requirement	Annual Requirement
Rice	6,875 M.TT	82,500 M.TT
Flour	2,475 M.TT	29,700 M.TT
Sugar	1,512 M.TT	16,144 M.TT
Cereals	1,032 M.TT	12,375 M.TT
Total	11,894 M.TT	142,719 M.TT

Item	Stocks Received by Ships From C.G.E.S.				
	1990 M.TT Aug-Dec	1991 M.TT	1992 M.TT	1993 M.TT	1994 M.TT To 31.7.
Rice	8,170	30,145	20,077	33,200	9,949
Flour	5,977	26,773	30,012	34,405	23,418
Sugar	3,731	6,940	9,677	11,201	5,651
Cereals	1,287	1,822	920	2,353	1,259
Milk Food	560	1,889	969	636	120
Total	19,725	67,569	61,655	81,795	40,397

Flour consumption in the district increased considerably and rice consumption dropped as most families substituted bread for their meals owing to the high cost of rice. Scarcity and high cost of firewood also contributed in a large measure to the meal of bread being preferred to rice.

1.5 Fuel and Power Supply to the District

Jaffna district was plunged into darkness with the termination of hydro-electricity supply to the Jaffna district in June, 1990. Some efforts were made by the Electricity Board to operate the standby generators with the available fuel in the storage tanks at the Chunnakam Power Station and provide a restricted supply to the essential service institutions like the hospitals, water supply installations, etc. This too was disrupted when the Air Force bombed the Chunnakam Power Station on 8th August, 1990.

All forms of fuel including kerosene were not permitted to the North this side of Vavuniya and shortages were so acute in the latter half of 1990, 1991, and 1992, the price of kerosene was around Rs.250/- a bottle. Majority of the homes spent the

nights in total darkness as they could not afford the price. In 1993, the Government decided to allow a monthly quota of kerosene for shipment to Jaffna. At first it was 4,500 barrels a month which was increased to 6,500 barrels later. This was distributed to the people on a rationed basis varying from 2 to 4 litres. Price of kerosene dropped considerably in the open market and remained around Rs.60/- a litre during 1993. Kerosene supply was further relaxed in 1994 and the open market price is now around Rs.45/- a litre. Kerosene received by Govt. Agent from CGES and distributed to the people is priced at Rs.25/- a litre which is over 100% the Colombo price. This is owing to the cost of empty barrels, freight and handling at both ends.

1.6 Health and Sanitation

Health Services both preventive and curative were totally disorganised and came to a standstill with the outbreak of the war in June, 1990. The Jaffna Teaching Hospital suffered severe damages owing to air attacks and shelling from Jaffna Fort. The entire staff of the hospital deserted the institution as the area came under heavy fire from the security forces in a bid to secure the nearby Jaffna Fort Security Forces Camp, during the months June, July, August and September, 1990. Tellippalai Hospital was brought under army control and ceased to function. Point Pedro Hospital also suffered damages. The Jaffna Teaching Hospital was temporarily moved to a private hospital at Manipay Green Memorial Hospital and made to function on a limited scale. But this too suffered serial attacks in which patients and hospital staff suffered casualties. The peripheral units and rural hospitals too did not function properly as there was widespread bombing and shelling. Many people perished during the latter half of 1990 and early 1991 without proper medical attention. The situation was highly critical. In November, 1990 Jaffna Teaching Hospital was reopened under the auspices of the ICRC with mutual recognition of a safety zone around the hospital premises. The Point Pedro Base Hospital also improved its services with Medical Personnel from the French Volunteer Organisations - MSF. However, shortage of medical personnel is very acute even now and almost all the hospitals in the district are understaffed.

The preventive services too were badly disrupted. There was severe shortage of drugs, chemicals, equipment and transport to provide preventive services. The health situation and sanitation facilities suffered a serious setback with mass displacement of families who had to be accommodated in crowded welfare centres. Drinking water and toilet facilities are inadequate and created health and sanitation hazards. Infection and diseases are rampant.

Nutritional food was very scarce and expensive. Price of eggs soared up to Rs.10/- each. Meat of all varieties was scarce and the prices were above the common man's reach – beef at Rs.120/- per kilo, mutton at Rs.160/- a kilo and chicken was around Rs.250/-, fish was a precious item with a total ban on fishing. Malnutrition has had its effect on the population of the district, children are particularly affected badly.

1.7 Education

The school going children have been facing tremendous hardships in their educational needs. At least 164 schools including some leading schools with over 65,000 students

on roll have been displaced and functioning in temporary sheds without even the basic needs as regards furniture and other requirement. Most of the leading schools in the Jaffna City and suburban towns suffered extensive damages. The atmosphere required for regular studies both at school and at home does not exist owing to aerial bombing and frequent shelling.

Lighting facilities for night studies especially for students preparing for important examinations are very limited. Even kerosene lamps had been difficult at certain times. Most children suffered from malnutrition and are not physically fit for concentrated study.

2.0 I would now wish to focus on the problems of the district that require immediate attention.

2.1 Loss of Lives and Destruction to Properties

Loss of civilian lives and colossal destruction to civilian properties must be halted. The sense of insecurity in the minds of the people has to be removed and living in safe and secure surroundings has to be restored. This will be a tremendous relief to the people of the district. They must be free from fear of air attacks, shellings from security forces camp around the district and cannon fire from naval boats.

2.2 Resettlement of Displaced Families

Almost one third of the population of the district have been rendered destitutes and refugees, and living under miserable conditions in welfare camps and at the mercy of relatives and friends. Resettlement of these families is going to be a huge task and difficult. Most of the houses in the areas occupied by the security forces are believed to be either destroyed or damaged. Reconstructing these houses and resettling these displaced families will take considerable time. Early action to create suitable conditions for the commencement of a resettlement programme will infuse hope and be a succour to the grief stricken thousands of families in the district.

2.3 Earning Capacity of the People To Be Restored

Thousands of wage earners, traders, skilled workmen, fishermen and cultivators who had lost their earning capacity owing to the war and resultant embargo imposed on the district have to be provided opportunities to make a living. The building industry should be recommenced. Free movement of merchandise to and from the district, restoration of power and fuel supply, lifting of the ban on fishing, all these will have to happen if the normal economic activity is to be revived. Most of the persons who lost their earning capacity are not being granted any relief as issued to the displaced families. They have been denied their avenues of employment and income and yet not been granted any relief. Urgent necessity is to restore the conditions suitable for them to earn an income to sustain their family members.

2.4 Food and Other Essential Supplies

It can be observed from statistics given in the foregoing paras the supply of essential food items by ships from CGES has been less than half the annual requirement of the district in the years 1991 and 1992. In 1993 it was 56% of the annual requirement.

Supply to the district from any other sources is meagre and could not make any impact on the shortfall. The extent of starvation that is prevalent in the district could be assessed from the shortfall of supplies to the district. Starvation and malnutrition have had a serious impact on the population and the consequences will be continuous.

Sufficient supplies of essential food items have to be sent to the district. Quality of the food items sent also has to be improved as very often poor quality rice and certain other items are sent and these have to be virtually forced upon the displaced families as relief issues. Urgent and immediate measures also have to be taken to make available nutritional food at reasonable prices.

2.5 Health and Sanitation Needs

There is acute shortage of medical personnel in all hospitals of the district. Urgent and immediate steps have to be taken to post the required cadre of doctors and specialists to restore the normal health services. The restriction on medical supplies and equipment should be removed and all requirements as usual should be sent to the hospitals so that the suffering people could avail the required medical treatment. Relaxation of restriction in the transport of medical items to the private sector will enhance the services in the district and reduce costs. Many private medical institutions have ceased to function owing to the difficulties in obtaining the supplies.

Restoration of preventive services will be equally important to bring the widespread infection and diseases under control. The people of the district have paid heavily owing to the disruption of preventive services. Infant mortality has been quite high during the last few years especially amongst the children of displaced families who are exposed to infection. Chemical, equipment and transport necessary to effectively carry out the preventive services have to be permitted to the district in adequate quantities.

2.6 Transport

Transport of all forms except for the bicycles came to a standstill with the ban on fuel and spare parts. Very few vehicles operated with kerosene, carried overloaded passengers on the trunk routes for travel outside the district. The cost of this was prohibitive. The roads are all in appalling condition and even cycling along these roads is difficult. The present, only access to the district through Kilali lagoon is hazardous, expensive and time consuming. Free access to the district overland is a necessity to improve the living conditions of the people. Supply of fuel, spare parts and even new vehicles is necessary to resume the transport services in the district. At least the trunk and suburban roads have to be repaired urgently to restore the road transport in the district.

General

The stoppage of the war as promised by the new Government is the urgent necessity to end the unnecessary loss of lives and colossal destruction of national wealth. The people of the district are very confident that Your Honour will bring about the much needed peace and normalcy very early. They are now hopeful that their sufferings are coming to an end, very soon they will be able to at least obtain the essentials for life and will be spared of the agonies they have been undergoing for so long.